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LETTERS OF AMERICAN CLERGYMEN

1711 TO 1860

SELECTIONS EDITED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

By VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS
CHIEF OF THE AMERICAN HISTORY DIVISION
AND KEEPER OF MANUSCRIPTS

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LETTERS OF AMERICAN CLERGYMEN 1711 TO 1860

IN January of this year, The New York Public Library received an interesting collection of letters by American clergymen, from 1711 to 1860, the donor being Simon Gratz, Esq., of Philadelphia. There are 172 letters, making about 304 pages. Some of them are addressed to Eleazar and John Wheelock, successively presidents of Dartmouth College, and to Rev. Dr. Stephen Williams, of Longmeadow, near Springfield, Mass. The subject-matter is generally ecclesiastical in character, but by no means exclusively so. Important public matters or early American education are discussed generously by several of the writers. The following five letters have been selected for printing as representative of the collection.

— VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS, Keeper of Manuscripts.

JOSEPH GREEN TO STEPHEN WILLIAMS

Boston October y^e^ 20^th^ 1722

Rev^d^ S^r^

Tho' I am almost afraid I shall glutt you w^th^ Epistles, and by reiterated writing, render my lines distastefull unto you if I hold this trade by all opportunities; Yett w^n^ very Convenient opportunities (as this is) do present, I shall not be wholly silent, tho' I am sensible of the unpolishedness of my lines, untill my silence be comanded or intimated by your Pen or otherways; as my writing so frequently doth verifie; what I can relate unto you in this Epistle that I can presume would be gratefull unto you shall be comprized in a few words; we hear in the last Ships from England that the Bishop of Rochester is in the Tower for some treasonable fact, who (as we likewise hear) has deserved such treatment long before now: The Nation (as they relate) is in a great confusion upon w^t^ particular head I cant say;

Coll. Taylor M^r^ Secretary & Coll. Stoddard are gone dow[n] to y^e^ Eastward with the Mohawks, (one of whom that was left here under great Indispositions of body (by the bloody flux) on y^e^ 17 Instant departed this life & on yesterday Evening was honourably interred with a sword upon his Coffin, carried by Porters, and six Captains of our militia for his paul holders, was followed by the Council and all the officers of the militia beside other Gentlemen of the Town, the number of the spectators were innumerable &c. The intent of their going thither is to enquire the reasons of the last rebellious rupture, & to endeavour y^e^ Establishment of a well-grounded Peace (if it might be effected) between us & the Indians, the mohawks becoming Sponsors for the Indians, what the event of it will be we must leave.

Whilest Mr Eliott was with us here Mr Checkley, Dr Gibbins & Greaves used many Stratagems for the obtaining his Conversation, which Mr Elliott as resolutely declined. Mr Harris's conduct in this affair is admirable, he shews no willingness to receive them into the Church; I hear he has suspended Jack Torey as a nonjurour from their Communion. Mr Cutler is daily expected here to sail in Lethered to whom the oath of allegiance &c will be offered (as we suppose) before he goes, which if he refuses, we may suppose he will not meet wth very good acceptance in England, (if he takes it, it may obviate many reflections that may otherwise be cast upon him

Mr Cook is like to settle att Sudbury, & Mr Dexter has a Call to Mystick, but of these things Gerald must inform you; Gerald is in all imaginable hurry so that I cant pform what I att first proposed, butt am forced to break of abruptly, wth presenting my humble service to Mrs Williams, Duty to Mr Brewer &c and all that enquire after me, intreating Seriously your Prayers for a barren sinner under the Cultivation of Gods vineyard, who yet desire to have my dependence upon him on all occations.

I am Revd Sr your most humble & obliged Servt

J. Green

[*Addressed:*] To the Revd Mr Stephen Williams Pastour of a Church att Springfield [Mass.] ℔ Mr Gerald Q D C

Caleb Smith to Jacob Green

Very Dear & Revd Sir

I should have been exceeding glad to have seen you here this week, for as to my self have been so disordered with a violent Cold I tooke the Day I left Princeton, that have been obliged for the most Part to keep my Roome since my Return Home. It is seated on the right Side of my Head, and attended with a violent Pain in my Ear, I pray that God would help me to improve under his chastning Rod; alas I have Reason to be abased in the Dust that I have got no more Benefit by past Tribulations. O my Leanness! my Leanness! when will the time come that my wretched Heart will mend, without divine Grace every Dispensation will be vain.

I desire to join with you in Thankfulness for dear Mrs Green's safe Deliverance, may your infant Daughter live & be a Comfort to you both. I hope your Spouse is by this Time recovered, may you long be happy in each other.

By the letters which M^r^ Smith brought from Virginia, we learn'd that the main Reason of M^r^ Davies non-Acceptance of the Presidentship, was that the Presb^y^ there did not chuse to be instrumental in removing him from that Part of the Country, where they so greatly needed his Assistance; The main Difficulty did not lie with M^r^ Davies or his People; we therefore concluded to make a farther Tryal, & have put down M^r^ Halsey to sollicit M^r^ Davies coming to the College as vice-President untill the Spring when we might have an Opportunity of trying the matter before the Synod; and we concluded to send M^r^ Worter there to supply his Pulpit in the mean Time. We have a good Dea[l] of Reason to think this Scheme will succeed, especially from some Conversati[on] which M^r^ Smith our Messenger had with M^r^ Davies on the Head. We ap[p]ointed a Trustee-meeting the fourth Wednesday in November next, and concluded that M^r^ Treat should desire his son to come to the College at the End of the vacancy & assist in the Instruction untill the Trustee-Meeting, when it is supposed he will be chose Tutor, I am doubtful how he will fill the Place, but know of nothing better at present, as M^r^ Duffield declines coming.

M^rs^ Edwards & her Son are gone to Philadelphia, & I hear the Doct^r^ has concluded to let her have the Children, but the Son, I mean President Burr's, was very sick at the Time of Commencment, & 'Twas much feared whether he would recover.

I had Thought of setting out on a Journey to New-England next week, tho' it is doubtful whether I shall be well enough to go abroad, must leave the Matter with Providence, it is good for us to be disappointed sometimes, I wish for an Heart to improve all the Dealings of Heaven toward me, & to be able to hold myself wholly at the divine Disposal.

Kindest Salutations to good M^rs^ Green, with tender Love to your Children from Dear Sir

Your ever Affectionate
Caleb Smith

Newark-Mountains
Octo. 5, 1758

P.S. At Present it seems most probable I shall prosecute the Scheme of a northern Expedition. If it were possible should be extremely glad if you would supply my People a Sabbath in my Absence & I shall be willing to return the Favour.

[*Addressed:*] To The Rev^d^ Mr Jacob Green at Hanover

DAVID PARSONS TO ELEAZAR WHEELOCK

Rev^{d} & Hon^{d} S^{r}, & my very Dear Friend

These Present you my Kindest & most Sincere Compliments, Wishing & praying you strength & Grace, & Every needful Qualification, Requisite to mantain the Dignity & Character of the place, & Discharge with fidelity & success the Arduous and Important Trusts, devolved upon you: I Rejoyce greatly, often to hear of the prosperous state of y^{r} College; & my future Expectations from it (I Confess) are not small; It appears to me of god, & will outlive all the malicious Attempts of its opposers; & will flourish & be famous, when its Avow^{d} Enemies are Dead & Rotten.

I am allow^{d} but a minute by Esq^{r} Chauncy to tell you he has upon my Advice sent his son to be Disciplind at y^{r} school; in preparation for Admission into y^{r} College: The youth is Airy, & needs to be brought under the Yoke; & Confined to Close study; I Hope under your Wise Direction & Tuition he may become a Worthy man & a Credit to the Name of his Progenitors. He is too prone to Company & a Waste of Time; & a superficial method of study; I Thot it but Honest to mention this for his sake as you will herby, seeing his Weak side; be under Advantages to know, where to Employ your special Attention. His father Desires you would use all needed freedoms with him; & put him under any Restraints, or Constraints you shall Judge necessary.

M^{r} Boltwood is now waiting & can allow me Time no more than to Tell you; I dont know how to Express by words, My Dear affections & good Wishes to you & yours to whom I send Hearty Respects as to y^{r} self; Especially to Dear M^{r} Woodward, who is very Tenderly Beloved by his & Hon^{d} Rev^{d} & Dear S^{r}

Y^{r} very obliged & Humble Serv^{t}
David Parsons

Amherst Feb: 22, 1773

[*Addressed:*] For the Rev^{d} Hon^{d} & Learned Eleazer Wheelock D.D. President of Dartmouth College in Hannover New Hampshire ℔ M^{r} Boltwood.

[*Endorsed:*] From the Rev^{d} D. Parsons, Feb^{y} 22^{d} 1773.

From Charles Nisbit to ———— ?

[The following letter is incomplete and the date is lacking, but from internal evidence it appears to have been written during the late summer of 1792. — *Editor.*]

The hasty Manner in which yours is written has led me to attribute the Discovery of another Person to Mr. Wakefield, but it is no great Matter, as both the Discoveries are of equal Authority & Utility. Men that think public Prayer a Sin, will have no Need of the Sabbath, and those who deny the Sabbath, will have no Opportunity of Public Prayer. But I observe that you say this Mr. Wakefield is a Translator of the New Testament, & that the Reviewers have given a favourable Account of his Translation, from which I infer that it must be favourable to Socinianism. It if were not a laborious Task to translate the Scriptures, we should have many different Translations of them. The Germans are not afraid of Labour, & therefore they have many Translations, both of the Old & New Testament. The Story I mentioned with Regard to Dr. Beattie was not intended as an Instance of American Ignorance, as you seem to imagine, but of Obstinacy & Negligence, as the Person I referred to had an Opportunity of being fully informed of the Matter in Question. Your Doubt with Regard to Dr. Beattie is easily resolved. By the Law of Scotland every Professor must be of the Communion of the Established Church, & sign the Confession of Faith & Formula of Church Government. Ergo Dr. Beattie as well as others. Nor is there any Inconsistency betwixt this & Mr. M^{c}Donald's Story. At Aberdeen it is common for Students to pass their Course of Philosophy, & even to study Divinity, before they determine whether they are to be of the Presbyterian or of the Episcopal Church, & many adhere to the one or the other, according as they first can get a Settlement in either. So that it is very possible that Mr. Beattie might imagine that Mr. M^{c}Donald has not such Friends, as could get him a Place in the Established Church, which was afterwards found on Trial to be true, it was therefore his Interest to seek a Settlement in an Episcopal Meeting, for which the Doctor's Recommendation might be of Service to him. Nor do I in the least doubt that he would endeavour to remove his Scruples on that Head, as he has lived long in the Habits of the greatest Intimacy with Dr. Porteous Bishop of London, & Professes in his Essay on Truth his Indifference with Regard to the Presbyterian & Episcopal Communions. Yet I know very well that he refused to take Episcopal Orders, tho he was offered a very rich Living in England, with the Hopes of further Preferment, on that Condition. You ought to know much more of the Blunders of Printers among us, than I can

do, as I do not see ten of their Papers in a Year. What I mentioned in my last was a sensless Publication of Mr. Bailey's with Regard to Scotland, in which many palpable Falsehoods were strongly asserted. And I am glad that I am enabled by a Letter from a worthy Minister in Scotland, which I received along with yours, to assure you that tho' Mr. Bailey asserted that the established Clergy had mostly embraced Socinianism or Deism, & that all Creeds & confessions were abolished, my Correspondent, who is a pious & intelligent Minister, writes me that a worldly & graceless Spirit prevails among some of their Clergy, much more than Socinianism, or Heterodoxy of any kind. He says that the Unitarians have had very little Success in disseminating their Principles in Scotland, & that even among the Dissenters in England, where they had much more Success, their Interest is now declining, & that many of their largest Congregations are now endeavouring to get serious & orthodox Ministers, in stead of their Socinian Teachers. He says that many more orthodox, pious and able young Men have obtained Settlements in the Established Church during a few Years past, than for many Years formerly, & he mentions six Counties, in which Arminianism had prevailed much hitherto, but was now almost banished by the Labours of pious & orthodox Ministers, lately admitted, & that much good has been done in the Highlands, by the Labours, of the Missionaries & School-masters of the Society for propagating Christian knowledge, who have a fund of Ninety thousand Pounds Sterling, which they apply for the Support of Religion in the Highlands & Islands. And altho' he owns that Infidelity, Vice and Profaneness have made no small Progress in that Country since I left it, yet when they compare themselves with other Countries, they have Reason to be thankful, & to admire the Patience & Mercy of God towards them. You may depend on this more than all the Scribblers of your News-papers, who pretend to give you an Account of Matters, whereof they themselves know nothing. I am not surprised to learn that Lies are printed in England, as well as in America. The Spirit of the French Revolution which is sprea[d] among a Party in that Country, has much infected their Publications, & America is held up by that Party as perfect in every Respect. But some who have been in America, & who ought to know better, have been as guilty in this Respect as those who use Conjectures, or talk at Random, to promote the Interests of their Party. Thomas Payne & Joel Barlow have spread many lies in England, with Respect to this Country. Barlow says expressly that no Nation in the world is so devout as the Americans. Now if he only meant by this that those in America who were religious People, were as devout as others elsewhere, it would be impossible to contradict him, but if he means as certainly he does, that the Profession & Appearance

of Religion is as common in America, as in other Countries, he lies in the grossest Manner. I have never heard of any Printers in this Country who had exercised the same Trade in Great Britain, except Mr. Rivington of New York, who was the Publisher of the Royal Gazette in the time of the late War, & at the same time a Spy of General Washington's, the largeness of his Parts & Conscience enabling him to act in this double Capacity. Tom Paine will be perfectly in his Element in the French Convention, and if he endeavours to realise his favourite Scheme of a standing Mob, as the Organ by which the People ought to act at all times, in that Country, its Misery will be compleat. Indeed it is almost so already. How thankful ought we to be, that we are so far from it! Our Mobbers can only join with their Brethren in their Wishes, & by rejoicing in the Ravage made by these Wolves of Europe, give a needless Proof of the Baseness of their own Characters. It is probable that poor Lewis the 16th will have a Mock Trial & a real Execution in a short time. None will dare to appear as his Counsel except perhaps some Wretch appointed by the Convention for form's sake, like the Person who is called the Devil's Advocate at Rome, who pleads against the Canonisation of Saints. The present Demagogues, having so lately experienced how much may be done by a Mob, will not think themselves secure in their Seats, till they have got rid of the King & Queen, lest a Mob should be raised in their favours, which might sacrifice their present Leaders in a summary Manner. No Weather-cock is more variable than a Mob. It is only a few Years, that on the Birth of the late Dauphin, every Individual in Paris sat up all Night, in order to get the earliest Advices of the Queen's Delivery & the Addresses of all Ranks & Orders of Men to the King on that Occasion, vied with each other in expressing the warmest Affection to his Person, & the utmost Satisfaction with his Government. Now again, when the Gaols are pulled down, & their former Inhabitants fill the Seats of Legislature, nothing less than his Blood can satisfy them, tho' his only Crime is that of being a King, which is now considered as the greatest of all. But poor Lewis was no less popular in America. He was called our great & good Ally, the Friend of Liberty & Mankind, & his Wisdom, his Justice & Magnanimity were extolled to the utmost, & now when he is a Prisoner, he is insulted in his Misfortunes by ungrateful Wretches, who without him had been nothing. I am inclined to think that Tom Payne will endeavour to be King of the Mob of Paris, & to supplant Pethion the King of the Day, unless the Jacobin Club have another Candidate already in View. If their People can be kept from rising for a little time, it is probable that the Game of Paper Money will be tried anew, as great Fortunes must have been made by the Assignats, which are now at

an End, by the Death of the National Assembly. The Concern that the French Leaders are taking in the Affairs of Flanders & Savoy, tho' wisely meant to keep their Army at a Distance, & to turn off the attention of the People from their own Misery at home, will probably tend to overset them in the End, as when an Army is kept long on foot, factions may arise in it, which may turn the Soldiers against their Masters. Cromwell himself was almost overset by the Sect of Levellers, that arose in his Army, & you know that Charles the fifth kept his Troops so long assembled before Magdeburgh, that they turned against him, & obliged him to fly to Italy. I agree with you that there appears to be something singular in many of the Occurrences of our Times, but as human Nature is always the same from the beginning of the World, the History of the Times may furnish us with the Causes of these Singularities. The Progress of Infidelity & Atheism in France is more than sufficient to account for all the Wonders that have happened there. Consider a Country without Religion, Law or Order, a furious Mob pillaging & murdering without the least fear of the Gallows. Men without Faith, Conscience or moral Principle of any kind, intoxicated with imaginary Rights & Privileges, intent on Gain & the favour of the Mob, & these will abundantly account, both for the Confusions & Murders in France, & the Approbation that has been given to these Doings by Persons of the same Characters in America. All Men by Nature are just what the Scriptures described them. "When thou sawest a Thief, then thou consentedst with him, & thou hast been Partaker with Adulterers." Psal. 50. 18. Who knowing "the Judgment of God (that they which commit such things are worthy of Death) not only do the same, but have Pleasure in them that do them." Rom. 1. 32. The Scripture is the best Key to the Events of Providence, as these are only the fulfilling of the Scripture. Some well disposed People conceived hopes from the Beginning of the Revolution of France, because they thought it would tend to lessen the Interests of Popery, & even Charles Fox, who is not the most pious Man in England, praised it at first. But since he has been in France & seen things with his own Eyes, neither he nor any of the Minority of the British Parliament have undertaken its Defence. And even Dr. Priestly feared to trust his precious Life to the Government of the People, lest he should have the Fate of poor La Fayette. He was the man who made the King a Prisoner, & he is now a Prisoner himself. And his Sentence in Germany will not be milder than that of Lewis at Paris, as both will be tried by their Enemies. I suppose that Thomas Payne must undergo some Purgation or Penance for having dedicated his Pamphlet to the Marquis de la Fayette, but if the Convention appoint him a mild Confessor, he may be only appointed to walk thrice bare footed

round the Shrine of Voltaire & Rousseau, & after burning his Dedication with his own hand, & asking Pardon of the People in the Place de Greve, with a Rope about his Neck, he may obtain Absolution. The Defenders of the late Constitution of France will now be busy in refuting their own Writings, & proving that no Constitution, ought to last longer than from one Mob to another. They will also probably annex a small Dissertation against the Obligation of Oaths, but as this has never been mentioned in France, they will not need to say much upon it. Mankind are now pretty generally convinced that Oaths are but Words, & Words but Wind, as Butler observed long ago. You Air Balloons will probably divide the Attention of the People, & leave them less Leisure to attend to the Play-house & the Congress. They will likewise give your Citizens an Opportunity of spending their superfluous Cash, which is no small Conveniency. — But having detained you long enough in animadverting on yours, I remain with Esteem,

Rev^{d}. Dear Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

Cha^{s}. Nisbet.

From John Sergeant to Enoch Hale

New Stockbridge Nov: 20th 1806

Rev: Sir

I received your letter directing me to perform the cerimony of entering into a covenant of friendship with the Stockbridge Indians in season to perform the Service, the following is a Coppy of my address to them and their Answer, which I hope will meet the approbation of the Society, After mentioning my appointment then said

"Children and Brothers attend

In the name of the Society I now stretch fourth my hand to take hold of your hand to establish a covenant of friendship which you once proposed to the Hampshire Missionary Society, that they may join hand in hand with you in the great and important things respecting the good and happiness of your Western Breathren for whom you have manifested a great concern.

The Society are desireous to send some good men to teach the Indians the knowledge of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, if your Friends of the different Tribes should be desireous of it.

Children and Brothers

Be assured that their friendship will extend to all the different Tribes of

Indians, the Society wish they should be Informed that their friendship is not for the sake of their land or anything they have.

The ears of the Society will allways be open to hear your voice.

And further the Society now open a common path which leads from your fire place to theirs, and remove all the brush, and every stumbleing block out of the path that you may always see it clearly.

They wish your friends a prosperous journey in their proposed visit to your Western Breathren, and the good Lord would preserve them from all danger, and in due time return them in peace and safety."

farewell

A String of Wampom delivered.

The Answer.

Father you inform us that you are appointed by the Hampshire Missionary Society to enter into a Covenant of friendship with us for the purpose of opening the door to the distant Western Tribes of Indians by which means the light of the glorious gospel of our Saviour might be admited among them.

Father This information gladden our hearts and for which we now thank you.

To the Hampshire Missionary Society
Fathers and Brothers attend.

Our nation often remember the ancient covenant of friendship that was established between our Ancestors and yours. We greatly rejoiced when we heard that the great and good Spirit moved the hearts of many people in the east that they have compassionate feelings towards the different Tribes of our colour who inhabit the western Country.
Fathers and Brothers.

We are glad that you stretch fourth your hand to establish a covenant of friendship between you and our nation, that by the help of the great and good spirit we may be enabled to join hand in hand in promoting the happiness of our western Breath[r]en who are perishing in heathen darkness, by which means the light of the glorious gospel of our Saviour might spread among them.
Fathers and Brothers

We now join with you in opening a common path which leads from your fire place to our fire place, and remove every stone and rotten log from it, and pull up every brier which grows on it, that we may walk backwards and forwards to visit one another without hurting our feet, and this path leads

thro: the different fire places of all the different Tribes inhabiting the western Country May the good Spirit bless you and us, that this covenant may last to the latest generations

four Strings of Wampom delivered.

Done in Council this
19th day of Nov: 1806

The Deligation from the Tribe have for some time been detained for want of money to purchase necessary articles for their journey, they are now ready and waiting only for favourable weather when they will set out. A young man of this Tribe goes in the company to be employed as a School Master by the Society in Boston. As it may gratify your Society I will transcribe a Coppy of the agreement I made with him by the direction of said Society.

The following is a Coppy of an agreement made with John Jacob:

1st For your services in teaching the school the Society will agree to allow you $18 pr Month, your wages to begin on the day you set out and end on the day you return.

2ly In consideration of the great distance you are to go and the difficulty of transmiting you money I agree to advance you $60 and as soon as you are settled in your school you are to inform me by letter, I will forward your wages by Mail or otherwise lay it out for the support of your Children as you shall direct and as fast as it becomes due.

3ly It is desired that you continue in said school one year at lest and on your return the Society agree to allow a full compensation for your services, on condition of your observing the following instructions (viz) you are to proceed to the western Country with your companions a Diligation from the Tribe.

That as soon as you are introduced by your friends to a perticular Tribe as is thought most proper, you are to begin your school and endeavour to be regular as the stated hours.

You are to teach the Children to read and write, and as soon as you find it best you are to teach them to sing. You are to learn them some Psalms in your language if you find they can understand it. On the Sabaths you are to refrain from all worldly business and recreation.

You are to note down in a journal every thing important that takes place, particularly at the end of every week, how many Children you have had, and

what progress they make, and send me coppies from your Journals once in two months by Mail or otherwise as you shall find oppertunity. Our Chief will inform the Indians they must give you your board, and what ever they do in this way you are to give credit to the Society towards your wages.

You with our Chiefs who will be with you will use your utmost endeavours, that you be supplyed with books paper &c but if you are obliged to advance your own money for these necessary things you shall be refunded the same.

When you send forward your Journals you are to try to [obtain] some Missionary or Agent for Indian affairs to certify [what?] representations are just.

You will please to inform the Society there is a steady sober man of the Deleware Tribe who is expected to go in the company. he is not at home, but shall see him in a few days, and think of proposing to him to teach a school, to be under the direction of your society. that when they arrive among the Indians, and there appears to be proper incouragement, he should immediately write to me, when I can inform you the state of the business, in this way the $50 might be well appropriated, if this plan should meet with their approbation. as I borrowed the wampom of the Indians for the above mentioned purpose paid them the $4. If you find no better way you can direct M^{r} Dutton one of your Missionaries in this vicinity to pay it to me, who informed me he had money on hand for your Society, remain your most obliged friend and brother

in the Gospel of Christ
John Sergeant

Rev: M^{r} Hale.

N B It is not probable that any thing will turn up untill spring respecting a second proposed school among the western Indians wish your Society would so direct their matters that the $50 may be at command when ever there shall be an opening. as soon as I hear will write.

[*Addressed:*] Vernon N.Y. 25th Novr.
Rev Enoch Hale
Westhampton
Common Wealth Massachusetts

To the care
Post Master Vernon
County of Oneida

[*Endorsed:*] Rev. John Sergeant New Stockbridge Nov. 20th A D 1806

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